Comprehensive School Reading Improvement Plan

Using Accelerated Reading, Cross Age Tutoring, and Reading Renaissance Techniques

To Improve Reading Ability

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Distance Learning Endorsement

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Problem Statement

One of the educational myths in this country is that students are not learning to read. The book that created the myth was Why Johnny Can't Read (Flesh,1966). Actually, there are very few Johnny's, Cathy's, and Bobs that don't read at all. We teach kids how to read, but we don't do a good job of helping kids learn to read well. Too many kids are reading two and three years below grade level, far below their potential. Reading well is the principle reading problem, not learning the mechanics of reading. While educators argue about what works best to teach reading-look say, whole word, phonics, (Adams, 1990) and the like. They often ignore the more critical process of acquiring reading automaticity, the skill of reading well, reading fluently with comprehension (Samuels, 1993). Finding the time for reading practice is another area of concern. Reading is a skill. The more you do it, the better you become, the less effort it takes, the more you can do, the more you want to do. Unfortunately, this positive spiral also operates in reverse. For the weaker reader, it is a vicious circle. This is then compounded by avoidance on the part of the student. It's rather like learning to swim. You don't learn well if you avoid the water. You learn to swim by swimming, and to read by reading. This seems pretty obvious- yet the awful truth is that students spend very little time reading in school, and about the same amount of time reading at home.

Whether it is learning to walk, ride a bicycle, or drive a car, it takes our full attention and concentration to just manage the basics. If we are distracted for even an instant, we lose control. That's the case when a skill is not yet automatic. After enough practice, though, the brain can handle the skill effortlessly, unconsciously, which in turn; frees us to look around, enjoy the ride. It is the same with reading. If we are struggling to just sound out the words, if

we are hesitant readers, the brain is unable to handle the next stage of reading, which is comprehension (Price, 1994). Without comprehension, there is no joy in reading and no motivation to read. Therefore, the problem is a lack of an enriched reading environment where students are not given enough reading practice and one on one instruction. What kind of reading practice improves reading skills? Researchers have long known that improvements in reading skills come from listening, speaking, and writing, communicating in general, in addition to reading text. In a broad sense it's the richness of the entire literacy environment that determines how well we read (McNeil, 1992). Therefore, my reading program is directed at enhancing and improving the literacy environment. By enhancing the literacy environment both at school and at home, I can help students become better readers.

I will attain this goal by using accelerated reader, peer -tutoring, and reading renaissance techniques. These techniques will increase reading practice time and will alleviate some of the problems involved in learning to read. The ultimate goal of reading education is to create Communities of Readers where each student can fulfill his or her potential and experience the joy of reading. All students need access to the kinds of reading opportunities that will allow them to grow up to be successful members of their society. I hope to create these opportunities in my classroom and establish life long learners, who are motivated to read and are able to use technology to stimulate this process.

My purpose then is to supplement my reading and science program with accelerated reader, reading renaissance, and cross–age tutoring. I teach in a K–12 school which easily lends itself to this kind of a program.

Objectives:

I want to increase students reading ability, reading enjoyment, and understanding of science .

1. I will design an area for accelerated reader books.
2. I will create a time to take accelerated reader tests.
3. I will develop an incentive program to correlate with accelerated reader.
4. I will create literature units that encourage students to read accelerated reader titles.
5. The students and I will create an accelerated reader newsletter.
6. I will couple science core objectives with accelerated reader titles.
7. I will evaluate reading comprehension and reading enjoyment through a variety of methods.

My goal is to create life long learners, who are motivated, excited to read and are able to use technology to stimulate this process.

Review of literature

Reading is one of the great joys of life, and crucial to everything we do as active members of society. Whether or not a student can read, and read well, affects his or her future profoundly. The challenge to every educator is to ensure that all students achieve maximum reading growth. Accelerated reader has enabled students to engage in large amounts of reading practice with authentic material-trade books that students select themselves that are written at a level that is appropriate for them. Using the power of computer technology, Accelerated reader has made it possible for educators to motivate, monitor, and guide that practice so that students' reading ability continually improves.

Accelerated Reader involves three simple steps: (1) a student selects and reads a book; (2) the student takes an Accelerated Reader reading practice quiz; and (3) the computer adds the quiz results to its database and generates a report for the student and teacher. (Paul, 1995)

This computerized data-collection system is called a "learning information system," and it is what makes it possible to monitor large amounts of reading practice. In addition to collecting basic information about what a student has read and how well he has read it, AR. keeps track of whether a book was read to or with the student, or whether the student read it independently. It also collects data on how much of a student' reading is in fictional material and how much is in non-fictional material. In addition, it scores individual student goals –for book level, points, and certification level and reports back to me how much progress each student has made toward his /her goals. Accelerated reader also includes literacy skill tests that identify students' strengths in twenty-four specific skills that are assessed on core

curriculum tests. This information helps me target instruction so that students will master state and district standards.

The Center for Academic Excellence recommends that this learning information system be combined with a set of sound teaching strategies, which they refer to as Reading Renaissance. Reading Renaissance recommends that you: give all students sufficient time to practice reading – at least sixty minutes a day (Paul, 1995) provide the appropriate type of practice, which may involve reading to students, (Clay, 1993) pairing students with a tutor who reads with them, and/ or students reading independently, (Trelease, 1995) encourage students to select books that are meaningful to them and that are at the right level of difficulty, set individualized goals that are motivating and promote the most reading growth, regularly and frequently monitor students' reading and intervene if problems arise. The teacher will typically model the activity by reading a book also (May, 1994).

Based on the Institute for Academic Excellence research (Paul, 1995), the problems with traditional in-school reading practice programs are fourfold:

1) Too little time is set aside per day; 2) Inadequate attention is given to Read To and Read With activities in the context of reading development; 3) They lack clear, specific expectations for student accountability and teacher intervention; 4) A preoccupation with SSR leaves kindergarten, first grade, special education students, English as a second language, and other emerging readers out. Other than modeling, the teacher is not actively involved. The Institute believes the concept of TWI to be the most developmentally sound and inclusive concept for in-school reading practice programs. Under the TWI concept of reading practice,

beginning readers are read books aloud the “”Read to stage). As students progress, their is an interactive one on one assisted reading stage where a student works with an adult or more experienced reader. This may be unstructured and informal, or it might include a highly structured approach such as with Reading Recovery (Clay,1993), paired reading (Topping, 1995), or Duolog Reading programs (Paul, 1995). Regardless, all students go through this assisted reading stage. This is called Read With. Finally, there is the Independent reading stage, where students read books silently on their own. However, even when a child becomes an established reader, it does not mean that 100 percent of her reading practice should be done independently. Reading is a social skill, and shared reading activities are an important part of reading development. Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of read-aloud activities for all grades, including high school (Trelease, 1995); also, even very good readers can benefit from assisted reading of difficult texts (Vanwagenen, 1994). In other words, the mix of Read To, Read With, and Independent reading changes as students improve in their reading, Independent reading practice may become 90 percent of the mix, yet reading practice should always include some amount of Read To and Read With for optimum development.

Motivating Students to Read

Setting goals is an important part of Reading Renaissance and Accelerated Reader. Goal setting is highly motivating. It also individualizes the program, encourages self-directed learning, and results in greater reading growth. Choice also provides an important incentive for motivating students to read. Cognitive theorists describe

motivation as a process of thought and decision making (Phillips & Soltis, 1991). Children actively make choices and attend to salient factors in their environment. Therefore, providing opportunities for choice can be viewed as providing incentives to learn. In the Accelerated Reader program, choice is an important feature, it is embedded in the program in a variety of ways: children choose their reading material, they can read independently or have someone read to them. In the interviews I conducted with children, parents, and teachers who participated in the AR program, choice was frequently mentioned as an important aspect of the program. In particular, parents and teachers responded that providing the children with choices was the most highly motivating feature of the AR program. What is most encouraging is that research clearly supports the notion that there is a strong correlation between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation (Turner, 1995).

Research Reports:

The effects of Accelerated Reader and Reading Renaissance implementation on Muscatine, Iowa Schools. Grant Elementary School is a K-5 school that installed Accelerated Reader in 1992. Various data, including Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were collected for 194 children in grades 2-5 during the 1996-1997 academic year. Principal Paul Brooks states that AR has positively influenced his school in numerous ways. He reported that, " the number of books checked out of the library media center increased by 500%; the Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores have increased in reading ways. He reported that, " the number of books checked out of the library media center

comprehension from the 40th percentile to the 70th percentile; attendance has increased from 92% to 96%; and discipline problems have significantly decreased." (Brooks, 1997) Grant Elementary is a Reading Renaissance Model School that hosted an 18-day summer program in 1998 for all Muscatine elementary schools. Accelerated reader was used in grades 1-5, and STAR Reading pre-and post-test results were collected for 143 students. Overall, the students read and took tests for over 4,00 books, 105 students had perfect attendance, no discipline problems were experienced, and an average reading growth of 3.5 months occurred (Poock, 1998).

Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District: " Does Practice Really Make Perfect?"

During the Fall of 1997, COCSD adopted Reading Renaissance and Accelerated Reader district wide (two elementary and two middle schools). The district has a combined enrollment of 2, 389 students and includes the following risk factors: 10% limited English, 55% qualifying for free and reduced lunch, and 31% mobility factor. COCSD offers programs in special education, ESL instruction, Gifted/Alternative programs, Title I Reading, and multi-age classrooms, in addition to all the regular programs. One of the main goals for implementing AR was to assist the increasing number of Title I students in the district. COCSD wanted to find the correlation between classroom reading practice and standardized test scores. To support this research , STAR Reading (Fall 1997) and Stanford 9 (for Spring 1997 and Spring 1998) scores were used to measure the benefits of AR and RR in the school district. Furthermore, the authors wanted to validate the theory that higher reading ability would improve mathematics scores. The current study includes data on

approximately 850 students, and it will be continued for the next three years, ending in the Fall of 2000. Outcomes to date, the results are positive. The following table indicates that library circulation for COCSD increased by almost 18% over the two-year period since AR was first adopted. In addition to the library statistics, the following results were achieved:

1) The mean reading percentile score from the Stanford 9 increased 7 points between the Spring 1997 and Spring 1998 administrations.

2 In the first four months of the 1997-98 school year, STAR Reading GE scores showed an average increase of 6.5 months in grades 2 through 8.

3) From 1997 to 1998, the number of students in grades 2 through 5 who showed proficiency in writing increased from approximately 72% to 85%.

4) The number of students scoring at or above the 76th percentile in reading comprehension increased 6.6% between the Spring 1997 and 1998 Stanford 9 administrations. The number that scored at or above the 76th percentile in math problem solving increased 5.1% for this same time frame.

The authors concluded that reading practice and implementing RR techniques achieved positive and encouraging results on standardized tests. The district reorganized its Title I program to allow for maximum benefits and inclusion for its students. AR and RR programs will be documented and researched through the year 2000 (Adams & Osborne , 1999).

Achievement and Effects of Computerized Accelerated Reader Program on Reading Achievement

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact that Accelerated Reader (AR) made on the reading skills of middle- school students. The subjects for the study were 9th graders in the Gaston County School System, North Carolina. The students came from two similar schools within the county, Cherryville Junior-Senior High School (CJSHS) and Grier Junior High School (GJHS). The main difference between the two schools was the use of Accelerated Reader. Cherryville students had been using the program since the 1987-88 school year, while Grier students did not have access to it. Random sampling was used to select 50 ninth graders from the college-prep classes at each of the two schools. Third-grade, 6th-grade, and 8th-grade California Achievement Test (CAT) reading scale scores were collected for each student. A mean CAT scale score was calculated for each group for 3rd, 6th, and 8th grades, as well as the average gain per year for each group. Other information was gathered from both schools' Southern Association reports and from surveys that were given to all 9th-grade college-prep classes. The authors found that the students at Cherryville who had participated in the AR program for 5 consecutive years had a mean CAT scale score of 715.6 in 3rd grade, 761.6 in 6th grade, and 788 in 8th grade. The control group at Grier, who had not participated in the program, had a mean CAT Scale score of 724.3 in 3rd grade, 755 in 6th grade, and 766 in 8th grade for the same time span. Of particular interest is that Cherryville (AR) students started with a lower mean total reading CAT scale score (715.6) than Grier's non-AR students (724.3), but had a higher mean total reading CAT scale score by 8th grade (788 vs. 766).

The survey at each school also provided interesting information. First, the Cherryville AR students indicated that, on average, they checked out five books each nine weeks, compared to four books for Grier students. Secondly, the AR students stated that they spent an average of five or six hours per week reading, compared to two to three hours per week for the non-AR students. Three-fourths (75%) of Cherryville students indicated that they liked the program, and 59% of the Grier respondents said that they would be interested in participating in an AR program if it were offered (Dewalt &Peak, 1994).

Implications and Conclusions

Every reading specialist, reading teacher, and reading researcher agrees that reading practice is critical to becoming a successful reader and successful in school. After thorough research, interviews and first hand experience I have found a dramatic and compelling correlation between reading practice and improvements in reading and math scores. I would like to extrapolate this correlation to the understanding of the core science curriculum. I have found a significant amount of anecdotal evidence that problem-solving and critical thinking skills improve, that discipline and absenteeism improve, and that students enjoy reading and school more. Thus, I will devote at least sixty minutes a day to Accelerated Reader and Reading Renaissance techniques which include TWI. Reading is the essential skill and every student has the right to it!

Action Research

1. *Describe the problem* Lack of an enriched reading environment, students reading without comprehension and not enough time given to reading practice.

2. *Select a design* Action research. Review of research literature

3. *Selecting a sample* My first, second and third graders.

4. *Selecting measures* QRI Reading Inventory, End of the year core testing

5. *Analyzing the data* Comparing post-testing with pre-testing to gain insight into reading gains. I will compare this with previous year's testing. I will also compare previous end of the year core testing with this years.

6. *Interpreting and applying the findings* If the testing turns out to show gains in all curriculum areas, I will continue to use the methods outlined in my research project and enhance these techniques even further.

7. *Reporting the findings* I will report the findings to the Utah Reads Cross-Age Peer Tutoring program, School Board, principal, my fellow colleagues and post a threaded discussion on WebCT.

As a note: I have had the opportunity to write and receive two grants using my research project. I was granted a $1,000 match from the school board through the Utah Reads program. Another grant came from technology monies to receive a scanner, digital camera, accelerated reading disks and a computer to TV interface. This has been a wonderful opportunity and the research has validated my own beliefs!